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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 002295

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/PASCUAL/RAMCHAND

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TAGS: [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [ASEC](#)
SUBJECT: GAZA UPDATE DECEMBER 29, 1400 LOCAL: AIRSTRIKES
AND ROCKET FIRE CONTINUE

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Israeli airstrikes in Gaza and Palestinian rocket fire continue as of 1400 local on December 29. Palestinian medical, UN and NGO staff report at least 280 Palestinian deaths and 700 injuries since the airstrikes began on December 27. One Israeli was killed in a rocket strike on Ashkelon on December 29, bringing the Israeli death toll to two. Palestinian and press contacts report that the IDF declared the area around the Gaza Strip a closed military zone. West Bank demonstrations continue, and Israeli security forces shot and killed three Palestinian with live ammunition during separate incidents in Nil'in and Silwad December 27-28. End summary.

Israeli Airstrikes, Rocket Firing Continue

¶2. (SBU) Israeli airstrikes in Gaza and Palestinian rocket fire continue as of 1400 local on December 29. Palestinian medical, UN and NGO staff report at least 280 Palestinian deaths and 700 injuries since airstrikes began on December 27. From 0001 to 1230 on December 29, Israeli airstrikes hit Islamic University in Gaza City, destroying a classroom building and student laboratory, two mosques in Gaza City and Jabaliya, the Hamas "Interior Ministry" headquarters, small police stations and suspected residences of Hamas leaders. In airstrikes overnight December 28-29, Gaza-based contacts report that Israeli Apache helicopters destroyed a PIJ office in Khan Yunis and Rafah's city hall. Contacts in north Gaza City report Israel naval vessels fired at fishing vessels near Gaza's coastline on December 28-29, and Gaza-based political contacts report heavy bombing on the western edge of Rafah and in the Philadelfi border area.

¶3. (SBU) Palestinian and press contacts report that the IDF declared the area around the Gaza Strip and roads approaching Gaza crossings as a closed military zone, barring entrance to commercial and private vehicles, and press and diplomatic staff without advance IDF approval. Gaza contacts in Shuja'iya and north Gaza told PolOff early December 29 that they observed several IDF tanks and armored infantry vehicles in border areas near Karni/al-Mintar crossing and Bayt Hanun, while other contacts said they saw Israeli forces concentrated near Kerem Shalom bordering the southern Gaza Strip.

¶4. (SBU) Palestinian militants continue to fire rockets from Gaza, and Gaza-based contacts recorded at least 20 rocket launches and 2 mortars fired from northern Gaza as of 1230 on December 29. At 0840, contacts report four Qassam rockets were fired towards Sderot. No injuries or damage was reported. At 0930, a Grad-type rocket killed one Israeli (an Israeli-Arab construction laborer) and injured seven others in Ashkelon. Four other Grad-type rockets landed in open areas without causing injuries or damage. Hamas claimed responsibility for the Ashkelon attacks. At around 1050,

three Qassam rockets landed near Sdeot Negev and three other rockets landed in Netivot, without causing injuries or reported damage. At 1055, PIJ militants fired two mortars from the Shuja'iya area, which landed near the Israeli military base at Nahal Oz, without causing reported injuries or damage. At around 1120, the PFLP claimed to have launched two rockets towards Ashkelon; no injuries or damage was reported.

West Bank Violence in
Reaction to Gaza Airstrikes

15. (SBU) Israeli security forces shot and killed three Palestinian with live ammunition during separate demonstrations in Nil'in and Silwad December 27-28. The Palestinians had thrown rocks and bottles at Israeli police and IDF forces during the demonstrations. Demonstrations continue throughout the West Bank, both spontaneous and organized by PLO-associated, Hamas, and National and Islamic Forces (NIF) groups. In East Jerusalem, most businesses observed a commercial strike December 28-29. Nearly all shops on the main commercial avenue of Salah al-Din Street were closed. In a few demonstrations, Palestinians burned garbage containers and threw stones at police. At least seven Palestinians were arrested in these incidents, and two Israeli policemen suffered minor injuries, one from a stone and another from being struck by a vehicle.

16. (SBU) At 0840, a Palestinian stabbed four Israelis in Kiryat Sefer settlement, near Modi'in, seriously injuring two of them. Israeli police shot and critical injured the

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assailant, and transported him to a hospital in police custody.

Political Reactions

17. (SBU) President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) told press December 28 that the PA's priority is to stop "Israeli aggression" and restore calm, and called on both Hamas and Israel to return to the ceasefire. PM Salam Fayyad told press December 28 that Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip were "a disaster for all Palestinian and Arabs," but criticized Hamas (and implicitly others) for inciting against Egypt and Arab states. The PLO Executive Committee (ExComm) met at 1230 on December 29 in Ramallah to discuss the situation in Gaza, and the PA cabinet started its weekly meeting at 1100 to deliberate on PA reactions to Gaza violence and the security situation in the West Bank.

18. (C) Jerusalem PLC member Bernard Sabella told PolOff December 29 that many Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the West Bank are angry about the airstrikes in Gaza and sympathize with Hamas while it's under attack, but Palestinians in Jerusalem will not resort to violence barring a major "overreaction" by Israeli police. Sabella said the common feeling is Hamas overplayed its hand and blundered by rejecting national dialogue in Cairo. Jerusalem-based Deputy Waqf Minister Salah Zuhaykah said Hamas "Prime Minister" Ismayil Haniyah's comments have been "dangerous and irresponsible," and that Hamas is sacrificing Gaza's people for its own political purposes. However, he claimed that Israel has targeted non-Hamas civilians in going after police stations and houses, and said the poorest Gazans, not Hamas, are suffering the most from Israel's military campaign.

WALLES